

# Child Abuse and Neglect: The National Scope of the Problem

## **IMPACT:**

**In the year 2000,  
an average of  
2,400 children  
were found  
to be victims  
of child abuse  
each day.**

The impact of abuse is far greater than its immediate, visible effects. Abuse and neglect are associated with short- and long-term consequences that may include brain damage, developmental delays, learning disorders, problems forming relationships, aggressive behavior, and depression.

Survivors of child abuse and neglect may be at greater risk for problems later in life—such as low academic achievement, drug use, teen pregnancy, and criminal behavior—that affect not just the child and family, but society as a whole.

## **NUMBERS:**

**Each week,  
child protective  
services (CPS)  
agencies  
throughout the  
United States  
receive more than  
50,000 reports of  
suspected child  
abuse or neglect.**

In 2000, nearly three million reports concerning five million children were made.

In almost two-thirds (62 percent) of these cases, the information provided in the report was sufficient to prompt an investigation. As a result of these investigations, approximately 879,000 children were found to have been victims of abuse or neglect.

Nearly two-thirds (63 percent) of victims experienced neglect, meaning a caretaker failed to provide for the child's basic needs. Fewer victims were found to have been physically abused (19 percent) or sexually abused (10 percent), though these cases are often more likely to be publicized. The smallest number (8 percent) were found to be victims of emotional abuse, which includes criticizing, rejecting, or refusing to nurture a child.

Tragically, an average of three children die every day as a result of child abuse or neglect.



## **CHILDREN:**

**No group of children is immune.**

Boys and girls are almost equally likely to experience neglect and physical abuse. However, girls are four times more likely to experience sexual abuse.

Children of all races and ethnicities experience child abuse. In 2000, more than one-half of all reported victims were White (51 percent); one-quarter (25 percent) were African American; and 14 percent were Hispanic. American Indian/Alaska Natives accounted for two percent of victims, and Asian/Pacific Islanders accounted for one percent of victims.

Children of all ages experience abuse, but the youngest children are most vulnerable. Children younger than one year old accounted for nearly one-half (44 percent) of child abuse and neglect deaths reported in 2000; 85 percent of the children who died were younger than six years of age.

## **PERPETRATORS:**

**At least 4 out of 5 victims are abused by at least one parent.**

By definition, perpetrators of child abuse and neglect are the very people responsible for the child's safety and well-being (including parents, other relatives, and babysitters).

The most common group of people found to be responsible for neglect and physical abuse were mothers acting alone (47 percent and 32 percent of victims, respectively). In cases of sexual abuse, non-relatives and fathers acting alone are more likely to be responsible (29 percent and 22 percent of victims, respectively).



**Source:** U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Children's Bureau (2002). *Child Maltreatment 2000*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office. Available online at [www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm00](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/publications/cm00) or by calling the National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information at 1-800-FYI-3366. Statistics in *Child Maltreatment 2000* refer to cases of harm to a child caused by parents or other caretakers; they do not include harm caused by other people, such as acquaintances or strangers.